

Who Will Go with Fergus Now? The *Tain* Revisioned as *The Crying Game*

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Neil Jordan's 1992 film *The Crying Game* (TCG) has received much attention from gender and race theorists, but his use of Irish myth as the foundation for his transformative vision of personal, cultural, and national identity has received very little. While gender and race approaches to this film have been beneficial and enlightening, when we read Jordan's narrative within the context of Irish myth, we find the predecessors of his major characters, the tales that prefigure their behaviors, and the legacies that Jordan wishes to subvert. As Richard Kearney has noted, myth can be liberating, or it can be incarcerating ([1985]1986:79), and when we examine the myths that have been propagated to sanction violence and bloodshed in Irish culture, it is evident that new myths, or new readings of the old ones, must be created that will allow for a greater expansion of Irish consciousness. I assert that in TCG, Jordan examines the mythic icons of Irish tradition, finds their received meanings lacking in regenerative potential, and posits an alternative perspective—one which, while working within the framework of Irish mythology, de-romanticizes the violence of the past.

The pivotal figure in Jordan's film is Fergus, who shuns the tragic violence of the Cuchulainesque Peter and the Maevisish Jude. Each of these characters has predecessors in Irish mythology's oldest tale—the *Tain Bo Cuailnge*. In the *Tain* Cuchulain and Medb are committed to war and battle while Fergus is the lover, the mediator, and the storyteller, all qualities which ensure the survival of his race and its culture. In TCG, Jordan appropriates this triad of mythic characters, deflates the construct of "tragic Irishness," and presents Fergus as the hero Ireland needs. By focusing on the Lyotardian "little narratives" that comprise the *Tain* rather than on the "Grand Narrative" that has sustained Cuchulain's legacy, Jordan challenges us to renounce the violence of the past and go with Fergus into postmodern possibilities.

The Violence of the Past; The Voices of Today

To contextualize Jordan's use of Irish myth in the film, we should first briefly examine the manifestation of violence in Irish art and culture, how those manifestations have impacted Irish political activism, and the responses

of contemporary Irish intellectuals, scholars, and artists to what is known as "the troubles." As Seamus Deane notes, Ireland's literature is a "maimed and tragic literature" (1986b:157), inextricably linked to the construct of "tragic Irishness" which has permeated the Irish imagination in both fiction and reality. In the BBC series *The Celts* (1988), Frank Delaney contends that Irish literature is born of death, and if we consider literature as a mirror of culture, then Irish culture itself is born of death. It is this legacy of death and tragic Irishness which many contemporary Irish thinkers wish to de-sanctify. However, because the "link between sedition and literature [has] always been strong in Ireland" (Kiberd 1989:288), because of the continued bloodshed in Northern Ireland, and because of the history appropriated to justify that violence, progressive Irish thinkers are up against formidable odds.

Although art, politics, and violence have always been closely related throughout Ireland's history, the era in which "sedition and literature" erupted into what Kiberd describes as a "bloody crossroads" (1989:288) was the era when the Irish Literary Renaissance met the Rebellion.¹ As a forerunner of this most potent conflation of the political and the literary, Standish James O'Grady rejuvenated ancient Celtic myth to foster national unity and to celebrate the "virtues of tribal society" (Cairns and Richards 1988:50). Ideally, by locating the Irish cultural identity in a mythic past devoid of religious or political influences, the Irish could foster a national pride and patriotism capable of negating the powerful influence of the English Other. In particular, in the figure of Cuchulain, O'Grady developed an ideal of tragic Irishness and gave his country an enduring "archetype of literary and political heroism" (Deane 1986b:85) that would influence not only Lady Gregory but also the young William Butler Yeats.

Yeats, whose own powerful literary and public voice was just beginning to emerge, soon gave the tragic Cuchulain a starring role in what became much more than a quiet night out at the theater. Phillip L. Marcus asserts that, ultimately,

Yeats's role in the beginning of the literary renaissance was indeed decisive. Some of his ideals had been entertained by others, and there was considerable latent talent; but it was primarily he who, by giving those ideals form and life. . . as well as by the compelling example of his own outstanding creative work. . . initiated the actual movement. (1987:276)

Thus Yeats, as the preeminent voice of this era, must share the blame as well as the credit for the literary-historical developments inspired by the literary revival, including what has come to be known as the "cult of Cuchulain" (Kiberd 1989:289). And while Yeats publicly condemned political propaganda

disguised as art (Marcus 1987:9), he nonetheless “recognized that putting the demands of art before those of politics need not preclude a politically potent art” (xxxii). Consequently, through the creation of two of his most influential figures—Cuchulain and Cathleen ni Houlihan—Yeats actually facilitated what he most disdained: a mob politics that eventually supported radical republicanism.

Yeats had “hoped to furnish. . . a spiritual alternative to the nationalistic model of Irish identity,” but the mythological figures he revived were instead “transformed into popular idols for the new Republic” (Hederman and Kearney 1982:155). While Yeats had envisioned the warrior Cuchulain of the *Tain* as a symbol of his own artistic suffering and triumph, the figure was kidnapped by Patrick Pearse, the leader of the Easter Rebellion, for public duty at the Post Office. However, it was Yeats’s *Cathleen ni Houlihan* that provided the initial spark that ignited the mob fire in 1902. Although Yeats vehemently denied that the play was a political vehicle, it was “with Maud Gonne in the title role. . . the chiefest success ever of nationalist propaganda” (Kenner 1989:39). G.J. Watson defines the extent of the play’s success:

Yeats. . . embodied and unleashed, in an extraordinarily powerful way, the definitive myths of the republican nationalist movement. There is the binding nature of the call of total sacrifice of all merely personal ties and interests to the service of Ireland; the emphasis on the need for blood sacrifice; the emphasis on the gloriousness of the heroic gesture, a glory which makes failure irrelevant, or indeed can make failure a kind of triumph. (1991:416)

In his later years, Yeats himself wondered if “that play of mine sen[t] out / Certain men the English shot” (1987:632), and as Watson suggests, Yeats’s play not only influenced and validated the Easter Uprising but also continues to play a part in Irish politics today (1991:416). *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, the play that convinced one 1902 theater-goer that “such plays should not be produced unless people were willing to shoot and be shot” (Kiberd 1989:288), remains at the intersection of that bloody crossroads. That a 1980s Belfast production of Yeats’s infamous play was backed by a banner quoting one of Pearse’s inflammatory appeals (288) confirms Kearney’s commentary on the persistence of the past in the philosophy of the modern IRA:

The Republican guerrillas in Ulster today frequently invoke, whether consciously or unconsciously, the executed founders of the Republic; . . . for many this very invocation invests their campaign of “resistance and suffering” with the sanctity of an ancestral rite. (1982b:699)

By revering and invoking the sacred archetypes of the past, Irish revolutionaries have historically justified their violent and destructive actions, thereby engendering what Kearney calls “mythological terrorism” (1982c:273). Kearney suggests that the traditional forms of terrorism—constitutional, economical, and historical—are all predicated on a “political hermeneutic” (273). However, he indicates that mythological terrorism often supports a political facade and cites the development and maintenance of the IRA as a case in point. As a result, figures such as Cuchulain and Cathleen ni Houlihan who “rightfully” belong to the world of fiction continue to impose death and destruction in the real world of history, a phenomenon that Kearney identifies as “the myth of the recurring past” (276). To describe how this phenomenon operates in Irish revolutionary thought, Kearney cites Mircea Eliade:

[M]yth becomes exemplary and consequently *repeatable*, and thus serves as a model and justification for all human actions. . . . By *imitating* the exemplary acts of mythic deities and heroes man detaches himself from profane time and magically re-enters the Great Time, the Sacred Time. (276)

Thus by repeating and imitating the actions of past heroes, myth is given even greater viability than it has as a metaphor for cultural identity.

To counteract the limitations imposed by the “myth of the recurring past” as communicated by the tragic and violent legacies of Cuchulain and Cathleen ni Houlihan, Irish intellectuals, artists, and scholars have worked together much as their predecessors did during earlier cultural revivals. One group dedicated to discovering the “open spaces” of possibility and fulfillment published *Crane Bag*, a journal focusing on Irish literary and political issues. In their inaugural issue, the editors identified the mythic “fifth province”² of Ireland as the place in “which a new understanding and a new unity might emerge” (Hederman and Kearney 1982:11). They stressed that this place is not a political or geographical position but, instead, is a dis-position, a way of thought in which all oppositions are resolved so that pertinent “unactualized spaces” can be perceived as a means of cultivating peace and harmony (11). The Field Day Theatre Company, founded in 1980 by playwright Brian Friel and actor Stephen Rea, took a more actively political approach by producing pamphlets in addition to plays, believing that the company should contribute “to the solution of the present crisis by producing analyses of the established opinions, myths and stereotypes which had become both a symptom and a cause of the current situation” (Ireland’s Field Day Theatre Company [1985]1986:vii).

More recently, Kevin Rockett cites the establishment of the Department of Arts, Culture, and the Gaeltacht in 1993 and the reactivation of the Irish Film Board as developments which will allow Irish artists to continue exploring controversial issues in their culture (1994:29). Overall, the Irish propensity toward conflating art and politics is evident, and the act of acknowledging this conflation is perhaps a necessity within such a tumultuous political culture. However, Irish artists appear now to be concentrating on exposing past and present political excesses. Kiberd suggests that for some contemporary Irish writers,

Ireland is a republic without a name, a place which does not yet exist, except perhaps in the Utopian imaginations of Irish artists, who are continually criticizing the blemished island whence they came and, by this very action, implying the existence of an ideal Ireland into which they might one day come. (1989:337)

Neil Jordan's body of work thus far suggests that he too possesses this Utopian imagination, that he is ideologically attuned to the ameliorating perspectives that intrigue the Irish imagination. Furthermore, he does not expose his country's blemishes merely for the sake of exposition but exposes them so that humane, constructive discourses can emerge. In *Angel*,³ Jordan's first feature film, he examines the senseless violence perpetuated by the IRA in a manner which Kearney suggests "may be considered. . . a radical deromanticisation of the cult of heroic violence which has fueled sentimental nationalism in many of its traditional and contemporary guises" (1988a:183), a statement which could just as easily apply to *TCG*—or even to *Michael Collins*.⁴ Overwhelmingly, in fiction and film, Jordan implies that before cultural regeneration can be achieved and before unactualized spaces can be perceived, a unity which reconciles oppositions must be achieved.

Kearney would describe Jordan's process as an act of the "dialectical imagination," the act of freeing "oneself from the 'linear' illusion for the reconstruction of reality" (1982a:17). Kearney further explains the difference between the linear illusion and the dialectical imagination as such:

The "linear" illusion is that our present state is in fact the best of all possible worlds; it deceives by masking all other possibilities. The "dialectical imagination" challenges this by its reconstruction of a better "possible world." It overcomes contradictions by recognizing them so that later it may negate them. (17)

By questioning the viability of the loyalty that propagates tragic heroism, Jordan displaces the received linear illusion and reconstructs a better possible Irish world, an Irish world in which the "plain and perfect" Fergus of the *Tain*, rather than the Cuchulain or Cathleen of the renaissance, provides the prevailing dis-position. And as Kearney maintains, "what is needed is a radical interrogation of those mythic sedimentations from our past and those mythic aspirations for our future which challenges our present sense of ourselves, which disclose other possibilities of being" ([1985]1986:79). In *TCG*, Jordan discloses other possibilities of being through Fergus and challenges us to follow him as he approaches the threshold of the dialectical imagination.

Leaving the Patriot Game Behind

To escape the myth of the recurring past in *TCG*, Jordan first has to de-romanticize the debilitating discourses of the past before positing the re-constructed ones that constitute a re-visioning of Irish myth. Kearney would identify Jordan's as a postmodern transitional approach that attempts to mediate between the revivalist and modernist tensions prevalent in Irish narrative (1988a:14). Kearney indicates further that the postmodern artist moves freely between deconstructing tradition and "reinventing and rewriting the stories of the past transmitted by cultural memory" (14). We observe the manifestation of this process in *TCG*, for Jordan does not altogether denounce his cultural heritage but presents it in such a way as to expand rather than restrict the imagination. As Kearney maintains, "Irish artists in particular cannot afford to dispense with the difficult task of determining when myth emancipates and when it incarcerates, that is, when it evolves into a creative symbol and when it degenerates into a mere idol" ([1985]1986:79).

Although resistance to hegemony seeks to emancipate, it often incarcerates when sentimentalized as it is in the lyrics of the "The Patriot Game,"⁵ an Irish revolutionary song which informs Jordan's critique of the violence that permeates Irish culture. Although the persona of "The Patriot Game" readily acknowledges the dangers of excessive patriotism, those dangers do not deter him from sacrificing his young life to be the kind of hero that sustains the deadly game. Indeed, as he is dying, he laments only his own impotence to inflict more death, thus indicating the misanthropic nature of the received myths that support the patriot game.

In *TCG*, however, Jordan shrewdly attacks the mythic foundations that perpetuate and support the terrorist credo implicit in "The Patriot Game" and replaces it with the credo of "the crying game," a credo that allows for the expansion of sympathies, creative solutions to problems, and cultural

regeneration. That Jordan intends to re-mythologize Irish culture becomes evident when we consider that he celebrates the positive, life-affirming aspects of Fergus over the negative, futile heroics of Jude and Peter, whose mythological predecessors are, respectively, Cathleen ni Houlihan (via Maeve) and Cuchulain. Ultimately, Jordan attempts to neutralize the negative effects of myth-inspired violence that have, all too often, been assimilated into Irish culture by artists, politicians, and revolutionaries, thereby perpetuating a culture of war that feeds upon the past and indulges in fanaticism.

Part of the past that Jordan must de-romanticize is the image of country-as-woman.⁶ Throughout Ireland's history, Ireland has been personified as female, as Patrick J. Keane notes in *Terrible Beauty* (1988), and it is the Terrible Mother aspect of Erich Neumann's Great Mother archetype⁷ that is most frequently invoked in Irish culture. Thus, whether she is known as Maeve, the Dark Rosaleen, Cathleen ni Houlihan, the Shan Von Vocht, or the Dark Goddess of War, the personification of Ireland as a Devouring Female remains a potent cultural signifier (Kiberd:283–87). Of the many incarnations of the negative aspects of the mother archetype operative in Irish culture, Yeats's Cathleen has been the most influential in provoking revolutionary fervor, for hers is the voice that calls men to play the patriot game. In Yeats's play, Cathleen—in the guise of the Old Woman speaking on behalf of Ireland—tells Michael Gillane:

It is a hard service they take that help me. Many that are red-cheeked now will be pale-cheeked; many that have been free to walk the hills. . . will be sent to walk hard streets in far countries; many a good plan will be broken; many that have gathered money will not stay to spend it; many a child will be born and there will be no father at its christening to give it a name. . . and for all that, they will think they are well paid. (1953:56)

After hearing this speech, Michael forsakes his hearth and bride-to-be, pledging his troth instead to Cathleen, Ireland, and death. Cathleen adds that those who follow her will

[B]e remembered for ever,
They shall be alive for ever,
They shall be speaking for ever,
The people shall hear them forever. (56)

And as Kearney notes, this passage, which helped inspire the 1916 Easter Uprising, contributed significantly to the development of the kind of mythological terrorism that continues to haunt Ireland to this day

(1982c:284-85). To attest to the enduring power of the rhetoric of Yeats's play as transformed by long-dead revolutionaries, Kearney cites a graffito written in 1980 by an inmate in an Ulster prison:

I am one of many who die for my country. . . . *If death is the only way[,]* *I am prepared to die.* To be free is all I want[,]

and many like me think the same. (1982b:699 emphasis added)

By continuing to call young men to their deaths in the name of patriotism and duty, the Old Woman is perpetually renewed into a "young girl, with the walk of a queen" (Yeats 1953:56). As Maire Cruise O'Brien observes,

One has only to remember Yeats's Cathleen ni Houlihan to realize that, for good or ill, the goddess is still with us in one avatar or another. . . . Not only did she have her poets; she had her blood-sacrifice as well. She has been demanding more of the same ever since. (1983:36)

However, Cathleen has a less propitious place in Jordan's re-construction of Irish mythology, and he aptly gives his version of the Dark Goddess the name of the patron saint of lost causes—Jude—to emphasize the futility of the death and destruction she provokes. And as Yeats did with Cathleen ni Houlihan, Jordan finds his prototype in ancient myth.

Jude, via Cathleen and the tradition of emphasizing the negative aspects of the Great Mother archetype, is an avatar of Maeve, who instigates the violent action of the *Tain*. In the *Tain*, Maeve functions primarily as a war goddess, an incarnation of the Morrighu⁸ who can take the shape of crow—the crow of death that is perched forever upon Cuchulain's shoulder.⁹ However, like all ancient Celtic goddesses, Maeve is also a fertility goddess (Mac Cana 1970:85), and this aspect of her nature is exhibited in a sexual aggressiveness capable of compromising the actions of her lovers. As a modern Maeve, Jude inherits a formidable power that thrives through its association with sexuality, violence, and death.

In his presentation of Jude, Jordan illustrates the "hypermasculinity" that Kiberd suggests made the heroes and heroines of *Tain* so attractive to the revivalists (1989:287). When we first see Jude, she is both feminized and infantilized, dressed in a short denim skirt with white pumps—carrying a pink teddy bear, no less. With tendrils of her pulled-up blond hair falling about her neck and her make-up carefully applied to create a fresh, wide-eyed look, she exudes a softness that is betrayed only by the contrast of her black hose with her otherwise girlish attire. This sweetly corrupt appearance, however, is only the facade of femininity that Jude uses to entrap her prey,

the external gloss she assumes to mask an internal toughness. The real Jude, the masculine Jude, comes roaring back to her clan's hideout dressed in black leather on a motorcycle prepared to wait out this terrorist showdown with her male comrades.

Jude's toughness intimidates her allies and enemies alike. Her lover, Fergus, implores her to "have a heart," while her prey-turned-hostage, Jody, questions if she does, in fact, have feelings. Under the circumstances, it seems quite natural that Jody, the hostage, would question Jude's capacity for compassion, but for her lover to acknowledge this deficiency unabashedly suggests that Jude lacks compassion even in her closest relationships. And although Fergus appears visibly shaken by the physical brutality Jude inflicts upon their hostage, he tells Jody that "she can't help it," as if the propensity toward violence is an inherited rather than an acquired aspect of her nature. When Jody pleads with Fergus to "Keep [Jude] away from me, she's dangerous," he refers once again to Jude's insidious legacy—that which she "can't help."

Both Fergus and Jody are victims of a yellow-haired woman who, like Cathleen in Yeats's poem, "September 1913," has "maddened every mother's son" (1987:290). According to Elizabeth Cullingford, this poem "explicitly links the 'delirium' of Irish political martyrs with sexual passion" (1986:37), a passion Patrick Keane identifies as the "eroticized violence" that fuels the fanaticism in Northern Ireland (1988:101). This "madness," as Yeats refers to it, compromises the integrity of one under its spell, and Jude demands, usually at gun-point, that Fergus sacrifice his integrity as well. However, Fergus eventually finds himself questioning the role he must play as Jude's accomplice and realizes that in appeasing his politicized paramour, he has indeed suppressed a better, more creative and compassionate part of himself.

Jody, a marked-for-death hostage seduced by the allure of the yellow-haired woman, is particularly sensitive to the eroticized violence of Jude's legacy. Jody had expected to share a sexual tryst with Jude, the violent interruption of which, in effect, results in his symbolic castration. Just minutes before, Jody had commented that he had never before urinated with a girl holding his hand, thereby placing emphasis on the phallus before more overt sexual activity is initiated. Both verbal and visual references to the male sexual organ are central to the entire film, but when these references involve Jude, Jordan alludes to her affinity with the Terrible Mother because "the very thing the Terrible Mother wants [is] the offering of the phallus, though the offering is made in a negative sense" (Neumann 1964:88-89). Thus the phallus is yet another symbol of the sacrifice which the Devouring Female demands.

In the *Tain*, the Devouring Female also assumes power through emasculating her male victims. While preparing to have intercourse with Maeve, the mythic Fergus loses "his sword," indicating that he has lost the ability to function sexually, and he does not regain the use of it until he makes a commitment to participate in Maeve's battle against Ulster. Jordan implies that his Fergus is bound to Jude by a similar sexually induced political power; however, his Fergus ultimately refuses to participate in Jude's sexual blackmail.

Unfortunately, Fergus's refusal to continue playing the patriot game does not diffuse the threat that Jude presents. Even as he rebuffs her sexual advances, she tells him to "keep the faith," a slogan that reverberates with her tenacious commitment to the patriot game. As Keane predicted in his summation of the situation in Northern Ireland, the most likely demise of "eroticized violence" entails a scenario in which "the Devouring Female herself is consumed in a tumult of blood-dimmed images" (1988:101-2). Ultimately, harmony can be achieved only when this debilitating stereotype is itself stripped of its power to influence the collective psyche. Jordan thus gives a visual and psychological context to the fate of the "bloody red female," another euphemism for the Irish incarnation of the Devouring Female, who has claimed her last victim. Jude's epitaph might echo the refrain of an Irish ballad that presents a cynical lament of the sacrificial mentality that informs the patriot game: "Isn't it grand, boys, to be bloody well dead?"

Jordan implies that Peter is to be the last victim of the Devouring Female for whom the patriot game is played. Peter, like Cuchulain, follows the war-call of the Morrighu, and regardless of whether he fights with or against the Devouring Female, he is destroyed for his efforts. Although Cuchulain and Maeve are mortal enemies in the *Tain*, they both represent violence and destruction, and Jordan combines their negative aspects to emphasize the futility of the tragedy each provokes. Since the *Tain* provides only for an adversarial relationship between Cuchulain and Maeve, the relationship between Maeve and her husband Ailill provides a paradigm within which to evaluate the dynamics of Peter and Jude's relationship, while Peter alone evokes the aura of the sacrificial Cuchulain.

In the *Tain*, Ailill and Maeve wage war against Conchobar, representing Ulster, and Cuchulain, representing personal glory. Maeve not only advises Ailill about military strategy but also participates in battles and covert maneuvers. With Jude cast as Jordan's Dark Goddess, her relationship with Peter approximates that of Maeve's with Ailill. Although Jordan does not suggest that there is any type of a sexual—let alone marital—relationship between Peter and Jude, they are the ones who plan and implement terrorist

activities, while Fergus, Jude's lover, is merely an operative. However, Jude and Peter's relationship appears quite intimate: they are bound together in a marriage of ideology, demonstrated by their knowing glances, their easy camaraderie, and the concern they show for each other at times of crisis. Throughout the film, they are privy to knowledge of which the others are unaware and are united in their efforts to complete their objectives successfully, regardless of the costs.

For people such as Jude and Peter who are committed to the patriot game, personal relationships and fulfillment are secondary to the cause of the IRA; the spontaneous, natural growth of love and friendship becomes impossible because of the ulterior motives and extraneous allegiances that condition its development. This degradation of human relationships to achieve military success is best exemplified in Jude and Peter's attitude toward sexual interaction—the most intimate of all human relationships. In the opening scene of the film, Jude seduces Jody—a black, British soldier—to set their plan in motion, a plan that, though distasteful to Jude, was most likely conceived by both her and Peter. Like Ailill in the *Tain*, Peter condones the use of feminine wiles to facilitate military operations, while Jude, like Maeve, has no shame in proffering her body to achieve military goals. Furthermore, when Ailill is told in the *Tain* that Maeve is committing adultery with Fergus, he calmly replies that “It is all right. She is justified. She does it to keep his help” in the war against Ulster (Kinsella 1970:103). Given that Jude and Fergus's relationship in *TCG* appears to be more sexual than cerebral, we can speculate that Jude, like Maeve, uses her sexuality to keep Fergus committed to the IRA, and that Peter, like Ailill, is grateful for such a potent tactic. This speculation is given credence when Jude locates Fergus in London and implores him to have sex with her, a request made not so much in the spirit of an abandoned lover as in the spirit of a seductress who uses her sexuality as a means of coercion.

As a team, Jude and Peter expose the dynamics of the eroticized violence that has become less myth and more reality for those who play the patriot game; however, while Jude's depravity is communicated through her association with the Devouring Female, Peter's is communicated through his association with Cuchulain. From Irish heroic literature, we know that heroism is a lonely pursuit, that the hero must renounce love, friendship, and community in order to fulfill his destiny. Cuchulain, of course, is the prime exemplar of this tradition, a tradition that was transformed by O'Grady into the persistent theme of “lonely heroism betrayed” (Deane 1986b:86). Jordan, however, deflates this idea of the idealistic individual who adheres to a personal code of honor and is betrayed for his efforts by showing its extreme

manifestation in Peter's actions on behalf of the IRA. Peter's intoxication with the idea of honorable action is apparent in the speech he tries to make on behalf of the IRA as Jody is about to be executed, and his insistence on elevating Jody's murder to a ritual emphasizes his need to legitimize the execution, as if Jody will be somehow comforted knowing that he was murdered by honorable people pursuing an honorable goal.

However, Jody's execution scarcely resembles an honorable act; instead, it condemns Peter, as it did Yeats's Cuchulain, to a "career of violent and meaningless action" (Deane 1986b:157). In a 1977 interview, Seamus Twomey, a former leader of the IRA, said that IRA militants "must have no thought whatever that what [they] are doing might be wrong" (Hederman 1982:111). Obviously, the attitude Twomey identifies as a prerequisite to IRA commitment discourages reflection and self-awareness while encouraging denial and repression. Consequently, while the aspiring hero may consider himself to be an individualistic idealist supporting a just and honorable cause, he actually succumbs to a false discipline that fuels the fire of fanaticism and renders him a mere terrorist. As a loyal IRA unit leader, Jordan's Peter suffers from psychological bondage: he is both a product and a victim of the patriot game mentality, a victim rendered incapable of recognizing his own incarceration.

Peter, furthermore, possesses the blind heroic fervor that often culminates in tragedy and the creation of a sacrificial victim. Just as the members of the historical cult of Cuchulain set themselves up against insurmountable odds in the Easter Uprising, Peter plays a game in which loss is inevitable. Like the speaker in "The Patriot Game," his pursuit of heroism and his love for his country have extinguished his fears. That Peter expects his small IRA unit to defend itself against a well-equipped, organized militia indicates the extent of his fanatical delusions. The heroic Cuchulain of the *Tain* achieved fantastic feats only because he was endowed with supernatural powers, powers that Peter cannot command, however diligently he invokes the myth that both sustains and destroys him. Although Peter's actions may be inspired by his mythic and historic predecessors, Jordan shows the tragic implications of allowing that inspiration to pervade one's life.

And like the narrative persona of "The Patriot Game," Peter is eventually betrayed by a Quisling¹⁰: Fergus. When Fergus fails to show up to assassinate a political target as planned, Peter impulsively completes the assassination, knowing that he too will die. Peter's insistence on completing this suicide mission suggests a Cuchulainesque rashness that invests death with a perverse sense of triumph and creates tragic heroes. As Kearney points out, "It is because the IRA campaign cannot achieve military victory and is at times

even suicidal, that it can assume a sacrificial mystique" (1982b:700). Jordan poignantly illustrates the futility of this mystique through the contrast of Peter's commitment to death with Fergus's commitment to life. While Peter lies bleeding the ineffectual blood of an impotent martyr, wishing, as does the speaker in "The Patriot Game," that he too had filled the traitor's body with holes, Fergus is learning how to play another game altogether: the crying game.

In the beginning of Jordan's film, Fergus and his IRA compatriots neglect to question or analyze the ideologies and discourses that motivate their actions. Their hearts are, as Yeats might have it, "enchanted to a stone" (1987:393), while their rationality has been compromised by patriotic propaganda. As a result, they blindly accept what Kearney identifies as the "linear illusion": they accept the received terrorist mythology as a justification for destructive behavior. Oblivious to what Kearney identifies as the "dialectical imagination," they reject alternative discourses and ideologies that would support other ways of perceiving the world. Fergus, however, by way of a disturbing and often surprising journey, escapes the confines of myth-inspired bondage and its concomitant violence.

Learning How to Play the Crying Game

With Peter and Jude dead and presumably buried, Jordan effectively de-romanticizes the modern representatives of the two most debilitating archetypes of the myth of the recurring past, the myth that has impeded the Irish imagination's release into more open spaces of possibility and fulfillment. Fergus enters into these open spaces seeking an alternative to the violence of his former lifestyle and emerges from his journey as the true heir to the mythic Fergus, the new Fergus who can offer a vision of a better possible world to his people. It is through his renunciation of the values associated with the patriot game and learning how to play the crying game that Fergus assumes his new dis-position. Although the characters who teach him how to play the crying game upset his expectations about life, love, and relationships, Fergus's discovery of the traits inherited from the Fergus of the *Tain* guarantees his success.

In the *Tain*, Fergus is an exiled king who maintains alliances with members of opposed camps and who often acts as a mediator between warring factions; however, because of his fairmindedness, his loyalty is often questioned. Jordan endows his Fergus with a similar mediating quality as his Fergus interacts with characters who are opposed in nationality, race, and sexual orientation—the perceived contradictions that must be reconciled. Like his predecessor, who is revered for his fairness, his wisdom, and his bravery, Jordan's Fergus ultimately adheres to a code of honor that considers the value

of individual autonomy as opposed to the value of group solidarity. This desire for autonomy leads Jordan's Fergus to turn his back on Ulster just as his predecessor had done. In exile, both Ferguses are forced to re-evaluate their loyalties and commitments, and each chooses the quest, the path that is a grim fate for tragic archetypal heroes.

The character of Jody acts as the catalyst for Fergus's transformation; he is the one who leads Fergus to rediscover his "nature," a nature that embodies the emotion and honesty associated with the mythic Fergus. As an IRA volunteer, Fergus has had to suppress these traits to fulfill his duties effectively, but Jody, like the druid in Yeats's "Fergus and the Druid," offers Fergus "a little bag of dreams" (1987:102) to wrap around him on his journey. This "little bag," Jody's wallet, contains the link to Dil, the feminine figure whom Fergus must seek out in order to expiate his transgressions.

Paramount among Fergus's transgressions is the role he plays in Jody's death. On the evening before Jody is to be executed, he asks Fergus to tell him a story. Previously, Jody had told Fergus a fable about the "nature of things" that had visibly affected the IRA hitman's sensibilities, and weighing heavily on Fergus's mind is his lost innocence. He begins by alluding to a verse from Corinthians he had perhaps learned in church: "When I was a child. . . I thought as a child. But when I became a man I put away childish things" (I Cor. 13:11-12). He cannot, however, tell Jody what it means, for he is too distracted by the revelation Jody has provoked and is perhaps wondering how the child that he once was could awaken the next day as an executioner. He agrees with Jody, who thinks if Fergus cannot even tell a good story, then he cannot be good for much. "No, I'm not good for much," Fergus replies quietly, as his eyes begin to water from the tears he wants to deny. This lament over not being able to tell a good story also relates to the Fergus of the *Tain*, for Fergus himself tells the story of the *Tain* and as storyteller, provides a sense of continuity for his people. Jordan's Fergus is beginning to realize that there is no story to tell about where he has been, much less about where he is going, and the lack troubles him.

As Fergus and Jody grow psychologically closer, Fergus's compatriots grow increasingly suspicious and question his dedication to the IRA and his ability to execute his duties, just as Maeve and Ailill question the mythological Fergus's commitment. In the *Tain*, Maeve and Ailill offer Fergus sanctuary and, in return, expect Fergus to join in their battles. Fergus, however, finds that this arrangement compromises his integrity because he enters battles only "to avenge a wrong" (Kinsella 1970:174). Because of Jody's provocative interrogations, Jordan's Fergus begins to realize, too, that the battle he is fighting is not his own; however, like his predecessor, he remains bound by duty to his comrades and agrees to, even insists on, executing Jody himself.

As Fergus comes to realize the value of human life as well as the pleasures of friendship, he comes to the same realization that restrained his mythic predecessor from killing Maeve and Ailill's arch-rival, King Conchobar. In the *Tain*, Cormac chastens Fergus not to kill Conchobar with these words: "Harshly, harshly, friend Fergus. That would be mean and shameful, and spoil friendships" (Kinsella 1970:248). With sword raised, poised to make a kill that would inevitably bring him great honor and fame, Fergus allows the simple yet meaningful idea of friendship to prevail. Jody too ensures that friendship weighs heavily on Jordan's Fergus's mind as they journey toward the execution site. He tells Fergus he is glad Fergus is "doing it" because Fergus is his friend, and when Jody breaks away and runs, Fergus aims his pistol but cannot fire because he has been psychologically disarmed. Instead, the men take off on a sprint as if they were boys playing chase in a schoolyard. Jody's last words are similar to Cormac's words to the mythic Fergus: "Don't do it."

As Jordan notes in the stage directions, the seriousness of the situation is diffused by the men's laughter, a good indication that friendship would have triumphed once more, if given the chance. Ironically, however, an armored tank deployed by his own army runs over and kills Jody. And because of his changing sense of morality, Fergus accepts the responsibility for Jody's death and knows that, although he did not finally shoot Jody, he must somehow atone for his culpability. After Jody dies, guilt compels Fergus to deepen his understanding of his and Jody's "natures," and Jody appears as the ghost of Fergus's dreams to lead him to those unactualized spaces previously obscured by incarcerating mythologies. Fergus thus becomes the questor whose journey will result in a new dis-position.

To make his journey, Fergus consults Tommy, a resourceful old man who lives by the sea. And although this scene at first appears to be nothing more than a device to facilitate the plot, Jordan also imbues it with mythological significance. In Irish mythology, Manannan is the god of the sea; furthermore, he is specifically associated with the waters between northeast Ireland and Britain (Mac Cana 1970:69). From his citadel known as the Land of Promise, Manannan provides passage for mortals to the "otherworld vision of things" (1970:72) and, as such, functions as a "patron of learning" (Smith 1987:63). Smith also indicates that Manannan's worst enemy is the Morrighu, although he indicates it is not clear why this enmity exists (63). However, if we consider that in *TCG* Tommy assumes the characteristics of Manannan, it becomes very clear why the Morrighu considers him an enemy—he provides an escape route for the victims she needs to sustain her legacy of war, hatred, and violence. Jordan also emphasizes his

Fergus's relationship to the *Tain* by having Tommy procure passage for Fergus to the "otherworld" on a cattle barge, for "The Cattle Raid at Cooley" is the central story of the *Tain*. While his predecessor bitterly laments the loss of Maeve's cattle wars by saying "we followed the rump of a misguiding woman" (Kinsella 1970:251), Jordan's Fergus leaves his misguiding woman behind as he embarks on a journey surrounded by the preeminent symbol of ancient Celtic prosperity.

Once in the "otherworld" of London, indeed a place of learning and discovery for Fergus, the now-defected IRA agent attempts to change his name and appearance as a means of disassociating himself from his turbulent past. Although Fergus calls himself "Jimmy" and claims to be from Scotland, his legacy continues to haunt him. At the same time that his London employer insists on calling him "Paddy," Jude, Peter, and Jody's ghost ensure that he remains troubled about his true identity. Yeats's Fergus also sought to escape his troubled past; he tells the druid from whom he seeks solace: "I have seen my life go drifting like a river / From change to change; I have been many things," but the past remains in spite of all his efforts to escape it (1987:104). However, once Jordan's Fergus develops the traits associated with his mythic predecessor, he is emancipated by the very name that was once his greatest burden.

Jody's lover, the woman¹¹ whose photograph Fergus has seen, is the character who facilitates his emancipation. Conveniently, as a hairdresser, Dil can assist him in altering his appearance as well as changing his way of looking at the world. While Jody is the catalyst for Fergus's transformation, Fergus's experience with Dil undermines his perception of reality and enables him to develop the dialectical imagination that finally frees him from the shadows of Cuchulain and Cathleen. As Jordan writes in the introduction to the film's screenplay, "perhaps there is hope for our divisions yet" (1993:xiii). By bringing together two people who are separated by nationality, race, and sexuality, he provides a foundation for imagining other ways of being. Furthermore, once freed from the negative aspects of his heritage, Fergus can assume the positive aspects of his nature, the part of his nature inherited from his mythic predecessor who proclaimed in the *Tain* to "shelter the miserable, scourge the strong, watch over the weak" (Kinsella 1970:24). The name Fergus means "manly strength," and Fergus's pledge to "look after" Dil forces him to assert that strength as a nurturer and protector rather than as a warrior.

Through his experiences with Jody and Dil, Fergus learns how to feel, how to cry, and how to mourn the loss of genuine love, a love he could not muster as an IRA hit man. Although the haunting refrain "don't want no more of the crying game" alludes to the pain and sorrow of romantic love, crying is also the very measure of one's capacity to empathize with and relate

to others at all. If one lacks the capacity to cry, one lacks the capacity to feel. This paradox suggests that while one takes an emotional risk in developing and maintaining relationships, the risk itself expands one's ability to commune with others, thereby increasing the possibilities for experience, growth, and change. While those who play the patriot game are baptized by blood sacrifice, Fergus is baptized in tears, the baptism of the living.

To complete his transformation, Fergus resumes use of his Irish name, thus becoming heir to the exiled hero of the *Tain*. Fergus's sacrifice of his own freedom for Dil by taking responsibility for Jude's murder indicates just how much his experience with Jody and Dil has brought out the best in him. As Alan Watts writes, "the mysterious and unsought uprising of love. . . transform[s] our vision not only of the beloved but of the whole world" (1991:184), and Fergus's perception of his world is utterly transformed when he overcomes the differences that separated him from Dil and Jody. Although he is physically confined, his spirit is free even as he experiences the sorrow of love and life. This Fergus who protects, shelters, and nurtures is the Fergus who inspired Yeats to write "Who Goes with Fergus?" (1987:125). Dil no longer needs to

[T]urn aside and brood
 Upon love's bitter mystery;
 For Fergus rules the brazen cars
 And rules the shadows of the wood,
 And the white breast of the dim sea
 And all disheveled wandering stars. (125, lines 7-12)

Fergus is now a part of the crying game. Although the universe remains disheveled, Fergus's dis-position provides a direction for the future that offers hope. As a result of his journey, he, like the ancient Fergus of myth, assumes his own role as storyteller and, in that role, confirms that Jody's spirit does indeed live through him. Through the reconciliation of opposites, he attains a sense of life's possibilities and assumes an attitude that makes the acceptance of life in all its infinite varieties possible. Ultimately, he achieves the inherently poetic dis-position that one must attain to find the fifth province, a place made possible only by being able to imagine life as it could be. As Kearney maintains, "the poetic imagination would nourish the conviction that things can be changed. The first and most effective step in this direction is to begin to imagine that the world as it is could be otherwise" (1988b:370-371).

While Yeats asserted that Cuchulain was condemned to a life of violent and meaningless action, Jordan asserts that there is an alternative—and challenges the imagination to abandon Cuchulain and go with Fergus.

Conclusion

Critic Harlan Kennedy calls *TCG* the “best Irish film of modern times” (1994:35). Kearney, in his evaluation of Jordan’s work up to 1988, places Jordan among the contemporary Irish writers who consistently address the “transitional crisis in Irish culture” (1988a:280). In his rejuvenation of Fergus, Jordan provides a hero who is, as Deane might say, “unblemished by Irishness, yet securely Irish” ([1985]1986a:58), a hero who, like Joyce’s Stephen Dedalus, continues forging the consciousness of his kind. Fergus emerges from a mythic Celtic past and provides a vision of what could be if excessive sentimentality and fanaticism were abandoned. Although the film has been criticized for its easy revisionism, we leave our hero alive and looking not through the glass darkly but clearly, freed perhaps for the first time from the influence of debilitating ideologies and archetypes that would have ensured his death. Kearney adds that postmodern myth, myth which transforms the old as a project of the new, “encourages us to reread tradition, not as a sacred and inviolable scripture, but as a palimpsest of creative possibilities which can only be reanimated and realized in a radically pluralist culture” (1988a:280). In *TCG*, Jordan provides us with a hero who is poised to move into the realm of possibility while simultaneously affirming the regenerative potential of the past from which he came.

Notes

1. In April 1916, the Irish Volunteers and the Irish Citizen Army, led by Padriac Pearse, took control of Dublin’s General Post Office in what has become known as the Easter Rising.

2. Ireland consists of four provinces; however, the Irish word for province is *coiced*, meaning a fifth. The “fifth province” is often thought to be the middle or center of Ireland, although there is disagreement about its geographical location. It is commonly thought, however, that it is a non-political province, and when in balance with Tara, the ancient political center, peace and harmony will reign. For more on the fifth province, see Alwyn and Brinley Rees’s *Celtic Heritage*, London: Thames & Hudson, 1961.

3. *Angel* was released under the title *Danny Boy* in the United States.

4. Jordan’s film shows Collins’s transformation from a violent and brutal IRA leader to a potential mediator who was scapegoated for his efforts.

5. These lyrics to “The Patriot Game” were transcribed from the Clancey Brothers’ recording *Live at Carnegie Hall*, published by Columbia House, n.d. The original lyrics, written by Dominic Behan, differ somewhat and can be found at the *King Laoghaire* site at <http://home2.swipnet.se/~w-27271/index>.

Come all you young rebels and list’ while I sing,
For the love of one’s country is a terrible thing.
It banishes fear with the spread of a flame,
And it makes us all part of the patriot game.

My name is O’Hanlon and I’ve just gone sixteen.
My home is in Armagh and where I was weaned,
I have learnt all my life cruel England to blame,
And so I’m a part of the patriot game.

It is barely two years since I wandered away
With a local battalion of the bold IRA.
I’ve read about heroes and I’ve wanted the same,
To play out my part in the patriot game.

This island of ours has for long been half free,
Six counties are under John Bull’s tyranny.
So I gave up my boyhood to drill and to train,
To play my own part in the patriot game.

And now as I lie here my body all holes,
I think of those traitors who bargained and sold.
I wish that my rifle had given the same
To those Quislings who sold out the patriot game.

6. For a discussion of how modern female activists and scholars relate to the country as a female trope, see Laura Lyon’s “Feminist Articulations of the Nation: The ‘Dirty’ Women of Armagh and the Discourse of Mother Ireland” in *On Your Left: Historical Materialism in the 1990s*, ed. Ann Kibley, New York: New York University Press: 1996.

7. *The Great Mother*, first published in 1955.

8. The Morrighu is the Celtic goddess of war. One-eyed with the head of the crow, she boasts in Yeats’ last play, *The Death of Cuchulain*, “I arranged the dance.”

9. Reference is to the statue of Cuchulain which stands in front of Dublin’s General Post Office, the site of the 1916 Easter Rising.

10. “Quisling” refers to a traitor.

11. Although biologically male, Dil thinks of himself as a woman and will therefore be referred to as female.

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